



February 21, 2017

Testimony to: Elementary & Secondary Education Subcommittee of The
Appropriations Committee
Gail Nolan, Laurel Family Resource Center, Bloomfield

Good afternoon, Senators Osten and Formica and Representative Walker, co-chairs
and members of the Appropriations Committee.

I am Gail Nolan, Director of the Laurel Family Resource Center in Bloomfield,
and Bloomfield School Readiness, which is also run out of the Family Resource
Center. I work intimately within The Alliance for Bloomfield's Children, which is
our birth -8 community collaborative. The coordinator of that is also a parent
educator in the FRC. Our other FRC parent educator works for the school system
as a bus monitor and for our town's Leisure Services Department. In Bloomfield
we are a small community that works closely together to pool resources and
responsibilities to do the best for our families.

The FRC is very important in our community. We have home visiting using the
Parents as Teachers Curriculum for all families who are interested, do screenings
for children, make referrals to programs, connect families to needs and education
services and work to avoid duplication in our community. This year we have
received grant funding to start a Diaper Bank. The families able to take part were
most grateful and now we are working closely with Social Services, ABC,
churches, and businesses in town to expand it, as our waiting list has grown. We
host a strong network of Family Childcare Providers as well. There are monthly
meetings, trainings and playgroups for them to take part in, as well as their
children in care are a part of the screenings. I monitor the School Readiness
programs in Bloomfield, to help them to improve those programs and we host
monthly meetings for all of the preschools in Bloomfield to come together and
learn from each other. Since we are in the K-2 school, we work closely with

transition to Kindergarten and help children and families in the school as well. We were able to help distribute winter coats that were received by the district, and help families and children with needed referrals. We run parent education, and did a series this year on finance and budgeting. We have offered the Parent Leadership opportunities in Bloomfield in past years, and help maintain an alumni group.

The FRC model builds upon the basics: families, neighborhoods and academics to support an integrated approach focused upon creating stronger families. Every FRC operates as a system of partnerships between the school and other community resources to promote the development of a shared vision across community, agencies and services. Each is developed based on a local needs assessment which supports comprehensive educational reform where parents are engaged as full partners. For this reason, the core services delivered by an FRC may differ from site to site.

As with other programs, we have been consolidated in the Governor's Education budget with other programs that may or may not be in every town that has an FRC. We are urging you to reject the Governor's proposal to consolidate funds into a block grant. Instead we strongly recommend that you maintain a line item in the budget for Family Resource Centers be fully funded at \$8,051,914, which would give us \$110,000 per site.

FRC's leverage available funding and get the biggest bang for their buck. FRC funding is braided with other funding: Graustein Memorial Fund, United Way, The Parent Trust Fund, School Readiness dollars, Care4Kids, funding from Boards of Education, and other philanthropic or local funding. We work with the whole family, and every family that needs us, bringing the babies and families into the school.

We also coordinate with state wide and national groups to strengthen our work in Connecticut. The Alliance for Children's Mental Health recently received a grant to work with several FRC's to strengthen providing mental health training/information/resources to families. They have recognized that FRC's are local hubs to support children and families birth through 2nd grade.

FRC's are working with The Office of Early Childhood, All Our Kin, The Hartford Foundation and other stakeholders to come up with a state framework of how to work with and strengthen family childcare providers. The OEC recognizes the work that is being done and wants to build upon the strengths that exist in CT.

The FRC Alliance became members of The National Family Support Network in 2016 and are working with the office located in Washington D.C. They choose one group to be a member in each state, and in CT they approached the FRC Alliance, who already closely followed the guidelines of the network. The conference calls, trainings and conferences work to strengthen the work done in each state, who learn from each other on their work with strengthening families.

Thank you on behalf of Connecticut families and children for the many years of support you have given Family Resource Centers.

In closing, I would like to share a family story with you, that was written by a community member who works with the family.

The Laurel Family Resource Center has truly been a blessing to a refugee family here in town. When the family first arrived no one spoke any English and getting them acclimated to Bloomfield seemed like a long road ahead, but in hindsight it was less than a year. There's 5 members of the family, parents and 3 children. There's 2 girls- an infant, and an 18month old and a 7 year old boy who's in the 3rd grade. It was the end of the last school year when they came, social services referred them to the FRC. At the FRC they came to playgroups and evening activities. The playgroups help with the development of the girls making sure they are on task for their age. It was also a way for mom to gain relationships with the other parents/caregivers in the group. Through the FRC they became a member of the monthly diaper bank where they get an allotted amount of diapers for both girls each month. The FRC connected them with the ESL program held in town. Mom attended a parenting workshop sponsored by the FRC and they also signed the family up for the backpack program. The backpack program gives a backpack full of non-perishable food every Friday during the school year and the summer meals program during the summer months. The boy is speaking English very well, for example, he volunteered on the bus ride home to give the substitute bus drivers directions to each stop until he gets off. During one playgroup the mom shared photos of her family and gave insight on her country and their way of life before coming to America. It's definitely a benefit to all of the families who attend, who come together as a community and feel welcomed into the school system, and connect to local services.

The FRC Staff makes everyone who comes through their door feel welcome and wanted as part of an extended family.

Gracefully submitted, A Fan of the Laurel FRC

Thank you for your time.